

# The Handprint, the Shower of Gold, and Thingness of Architecture

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CONTENT / SUBSTANCE

## KEYWORDS

reason, hand, light, shadow, myth, practice

To grasp a beautiful thing or some difficult idea — the language clearly pronounces the hand-to-reason connection. In the world of things, this connection manifests itself in a HANDPRINT that a humble craftsman leaves on a handy mud brick, or a great artist in a perfect block of Carrara marble. In transition from essence towards presence, they leave traces thus uncovering the thingness of things: their purpose, shape and matter. The mythical lord of shadows and everything in earth lurks from the interior of a cave and comes into the light only briefly, to abduct the beautiful Proserpina. His strong grasp leaves the shadow on her white flesh, made known by the hand of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Taking a second look into whiteness through Sir Isaac Newton's prism, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe found color exactly in this area of diffraction between shadow and light (cave and glade; twilight at dawn and morning shine). Hence, he grasped that color is produced from the light, as much as by the thing itself on which the light falls — a property of its material and a consequence of its shape.

The lord of sky and thunder from whom nothing can be hidden becomes a Shower of Gold and enters from above into the beautiful princess' hidden chamber, to turn her dark prison into a pleasant place. Persephone's brother Perseus, the ideal hero who fights the darkness is born out of this mythical discovery of space — the divine arrangement. Along with the divine arrangement, it was exactly the spatial sense which enabled Johannes Kepler a look into depths of space to clearly see the motion of celestial bodies. In his vision, the planetary orbits did not simply occur in a dark void governed by mysterious gravitation forces. They are the consequence of the immaterial species which the solar body emanates rotating as if on a lathe, analogous to the immaterial species of its light. Rotating itself, this species carries the bodies of the planets with its strong grasp. In architectural terms, space is more than the volume of air enclosed within a chamber and lit from above. It is also the species (form, image, kind, emanation, spectacle, atmosphere) of the building — the thingness and the quintessence of architecture.

Every work of architecture is within many a hand's grasp. The immediate matter of an architectural project is the ink or even less material digital media which relates the imperishable forms to the actual presence. This relation involves nonverbal thinking in terms of space, volume and shape which we project into material and structure. But, no matter how detailed, a project can never fully describe the building which is its final cause. Manifold agents enter the reason-to-hand connection already within conception of any project, and particularly within its construction. Which color on a steel

cylinder skin would best uncover the hand trace of those unknown agents? Would it be possible in thingness of this tense surface, to preserve a trace of heat involved in its production? Which shape would show the right measure of shadow on a surface of a solid reinforced concrete wall? How to keep at least some properties of a liquid compound before it cools in casting? What does a brick really want, can a curtain really be the thingness of a wall? Whilst answering such questions, we discover the thingness and the quintessence of architecture, first, through a project, second, throughout construction, and even afterwards — until the building turns to dust.

Architecture is an eminently artificial human enterprise but subject to natural laws and principles residing somewhere between the mineral world and vegetation. It is eminently archaic, as the dominant epistemologies, pragmatic conditions and techniques may change, but fundamental notions, ideas and principles remain where they have been ever since the construction of the first shelter. Architecture is also eminently thingly. As a thing, every work of architecture is in opposition to our broken world of events. For better or for worse, in actual practice this opposition settles in the act of construction, as a project becomes a building: material, structure, space.

In academia, this final cause is out of reach. Hence, the most difficult part of project courses is the moment of substantiation of the intended thingness of the project-in-progress into material presence: form, image, kind, emanation, spectacle, atmosphere. How to guide the studio projects beyond the banality of mechanical problems (is the project sustainable?), historical reference (is the project new and different?), and vague concepts (what does the project stand for in social, political and whatever other terms?)? In other words, how to communicate the thingness of architecture to students immersed into an ocean of words and concepts — Google Translate, Google Search???

Perseus had to fly westwards beyond the stream of Ocean in the frontier land towards Night and decapitate the chtonic monster — the triumph of faith, hand and reason over schizophrenia and darkness. Persephone divided the seasons between the mineral and the vegetative worlds governed by the natural principles of growth and weathering, composition and decomposition, which govern the world of architecture as well. The ideal project brief which would surmount the ocean of words and concepts and explain the natural principles inherent to works of architecture could be described as: (1) closer to place than to program, with the scope of place extended beyond the immediately visible, (2) archaic but not primitive fostering thus the interest into questions of architectural

practice beyond the bare techniques, (3) that which puts the fundamental architectural notions in the center of interest pertaining thus to the world of things instead of the world of events, and (4) relating the reason to the hand — the elevated myth to the everyday practice.

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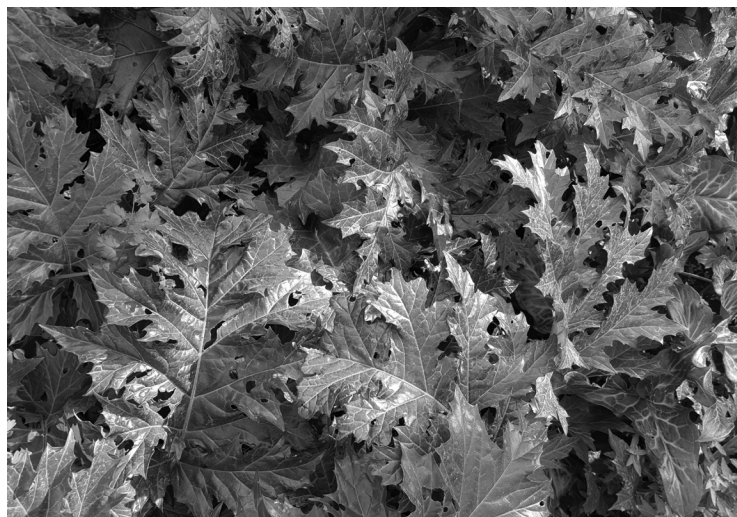
1: Mud brick from New Qurna, Egypt, collection KI



2: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Abduction of Proserpina, 1622, detail



3: IVANIŠIN. KABASHI. ARHITEKTI, Conception of Perseus — Abduction of Persephone, 2018, photo © 2019, Miljenko Bernfest



5: Acanthus, Mali Lošinj, photo © 2016, KI



4: Flutes in karst, Mt Velebit, photo © 2016, Tihomir Marjanac